

Background

At its December 2008 meeting, the SNC Board directed staff to develop a grant allocation plan for FY 2009-10 that would help to focus SNC's grant program more toward "on-the-ground" projects that result in specific benefits consistent with the SNC statute and Proposition 84. At that time, the Board also concurred with staff's recommendation to include as part of the guidelines a single grant cycle with one deadline that will result in a single set of funding recommendations for FY 2009-10. Based on the December Board direction, staff developed an allocation plan that required changes to the Grant Guidelines. At the March 2009 meeting, the Board discussed the major attributes of the proposed program modifications. Since the full Board was not meeting again until September, a three-person subcommittee was appointed to conditionally approve the revised [FY 2009-10 Grant Guidelines](#) (Click [link](#) to view document) at a subcommittee meeting to be held during the summer.

Current Status

Staff revised the Grant Guidelines and posted the draft for public review. A minimal amount of public comment was received and assessed. Staff believes the proposed Guidelines now include a number of policy and process modifications that will improve the overall grant program and result in strong "on-the-ground" projects for future consideration.

Because we have still received no word on availability of funds for new awards, the impetus for having the subcommittee meet to review and approve the new guidelines in advance of the regular September Board meeting was significantly diminished. Under the circumstances, it was determined that the proposed Grant Guidelines revisions for FY 2009-10 should be considered by the entire Board at the September meeting.

Following is a summary of the substantive differences between last year's and this year's Grant Guidelines:

REVISION AREA	FY 2008-09	FY 2009-10
Grant Categories	Three types of grants- <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competitive Grants• Strategic Opportunity Grants 1 (SOG 1)• Strategic Opportunity Grants 2 (SOG 2)	Two categories of grants - <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Category One</u>: Acquisition and Site Improvement or Restoration• <u>Category Two</u>: Pre-Project Planning Activities leading directly to a specific Proposition 84-eligible on-the-ground project
Distribution of Fund Allocations over the SNC region	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• \$17M total <i>subject to legislative authorization</i>• Per Subregion – \$1M• Unallocated – \$3M (may be allocated later by the Board)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Up to 12.5M total <i>subject to legislative authorization</i>• Per Subregion – \$1.25 M• Per All Geographic Areas – \$2.5M up to \$5M

Distribution of Awards over the SNC Grant Categories	Not Described	It is anticipated that approximately 75% of available funds will be awarded to Category One projects
Funding Opportunities	Three Deadlines – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One round of Competitive Grants • Two rounds of SOG 1 and 2s 	One Round, One Deadline covering both grant categories
Eligible Applicants	Definition of Eligible Non-profit groups limited	Definition of Eligible Non-profit groups expanded (as per legislation)
Block Grants	Offered	Removed
Pre-application	Encouraged; not required	<u>Strongly recommended</u> ; not required
Changes to Scoring and Evaluation Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change reference limited to carbon sequestration • Only SOG 1 and Competitive applications were scored / SOG 2 not scored • Identification of performance measures required • Long Term Management for SOG 1 and Competitive grants evaluated under “Project Quality and Readiness” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded emphasis on Climate Change • Both Category One and Two grants will be scored, then placed in High, Medium, and Low Benefit priority • Identification of performance measures and how they will be used to quantify benefits are required • Long Term Management for Category One applications evaluated under “Project Design, Management, and Sustainability” / Prompts for narrative improved
SNC Program Goals	Identification of both primary SNC Program Goal and any secondary goals required	Identification of SNC Program Goals limited to primary goals with direct tangible benefits; no secondary / indirect goals
Environmental Documents	Limited information on required environmental documentation	Improved support material describing CEQA/NEPA documentation requirements
General Modifications		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved language to help applicant recognize what documents/ responses are <u>required</u> in the application • Purpose of site visits explained • Two additional Appendices included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appendix C - Performance Measures ○ Appendix D - Environmental Documents • Description of requirements pertaining to projects with

		potentially variable deliverables clarified (e.g. projects such as fuels reduction or chipping in which exact acreage may not be known at the time of application).
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The following is a summary of the public comments received.

Comment #1:

1. Requested revision:
 - Add to the list of standard CEQA Exemptions:
“General Rule pursuant to 15061(b)(3) of CEQA (Public Resources Code)”.

Comment #2

1. Supported:
 - Reservation of funds for high benefit projects regardless of geographical location.
2. Requested revision:
 - Staggered application deadlines for Category One and Category Two grants.

Comment #3

1. Strongly supported:
 - Single annual solicitation cycle.
 - Focus on funding for on-the-ground projects & pre-project planning.
 - Increase in funding for each subregion (from \$1m to \$1.25m).
 - Focus on meeting primary program goals with tangible benefits.
2. Requested revisions:
 - Required two-step application process (including a mandatory pre-application “approval” / “ranking” step).
 - No roll-over of unexpended Subregional funds to the next FY – spend all in current FY.
 - No pre-determined funding splits (e.g. 75/25%) between Category One and Two.
 - Consider other grant program deadlines when choosing application deadlines for SNC.

Public comments were reviewed however no changes were made to the proposed guidelines. Staff is prepared to discuss the reasons for this decision should the Board require additional information.

Next Steps

At this time, it is unclear as to when the SNC and other agencies will be permitted to authorize new Proposition 84 grants. As information relating to future authorizations

becomes clearer, SNC staff will act to begin implementation of the current fiscal year grant program.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board approve the final draft of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Proposition 84 Grants Program - Grant Guidelines, Fiscal Year 2009-10. Staff is further directed to take the actions necessary to implement the Grant Guidelines as adopted, including making any necessary non-substantive modifications, once funding for new authorizations is made available.